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HENRY SYLVESTER CORNWELL

✻ ✻ POET OF FANCY ✻ ✻

A MEMOIR



ELLEN MORGAN FRISBIE



Henry S. Cornwell

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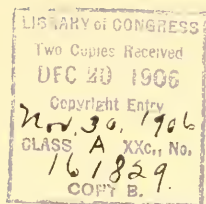
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ELLEN MORGAN FRISBIE

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NEW LONDON, CONNECTICUT

1906



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Q.M.P., Oct. 31, 1921

PREFATORY NOTE

In the Autumn of 1904, The Woman's Alliance of New London devoted an evening to the town's former poets, and a brief biographical sketch of Dr. Cornwell—the original draft of the present memoir—was prepared at the request of Mrs. Annie C. S. Fenner, President of the Alliance, as one of the papers to be read on that occasion.

A second reading was requested later by Lucretia Shaw Chapter, D. A. R.

It has been expanded and put in booklet form in response to the desire of many friends to have copies of the sketch for preservation.

Dr. Cornwell was an unostentatious man, not given to reminiscences, so comparatively little of biographical detail concerning him has ever appeared in print, or been handed down by tradition.

The eulogists of Dr. Cornwell who were named in the original sketch were noted men and women of his own day. A literary friend whose criticism the author invited, responded thus: "At least one bay for your poet's crown should be brought in behalf of to-day's devotees of poetry"; and offered this encomium: "Nature endowed Henry Cornwell with a fine ear for music, large faculty of language, keen powers of observation, and the artist's sense of structure; while his accomplishment of organ-tuning is reflected in feats of rhythm which make his technique of peculiar interest to students of poetry."

Friends who knew the doctor personally have since contributed from their recollections or manuscripts.

To all who have aided her with materials or suggestions, the author's thanks are cordially rendered.

E. M. F.

HENRY SYLVESTER CORNWELL

ARTISAN—PHYSICIAN—POET

BORN IN CHARLESTOWN

NEW HAMPSHIRE

April 13, 1831

DIED IN NEW LONDON

CONNECTICUT

June 8, 1886

“Whoever writes a poem thereby becomes the author of a beatitude, and whoever reads it shares in the sweetness of the blessing. A poet is a great gift to a nation, a gift to mankind. His words are a perpetual teacher, and an inspirer of noble impulses to a people and the race. A true poem has wings. It flies abroad until in its flight it has drawn its belt of blessing around the world. If we read poems and take them to our hearts and love them, they become ours by adoption.”

Thus wrote Rev. W. H. H. Murray in his introduction to an early edition of Dr. Cornwell's poems, and this appreciation of poets and poetry fitly indicates the spirit in which New London cherishes the memory of her poets who have passed away, and which has inspired the weaving together of these reminiscences and quotations, in memorial form.

Henry Cornwell was one of a family of children who were early deprived of a father's supporting care, and so compelled to learn the many lessons of grim poverty while struggling for daily bread. In his boyhood he was employed at one time on a farm in the interior of our State, and among the homely farm duties assigned him was the task of churning.

Naturally studious beyond his years, Henry ordinarily stood over “the quaint old-fashioned churn” working “the well worn handle” with one little hand, holding in the other hand a book which he studied.

In after years he pleasantly recalled the frequent occasions when, absorbed in his reading, the churn hand would unconsciously relax its duties, and the dasher come to a full stop; when from the inner room would promptly issue, in no uncertain accents, the admonition—“Henry, mind that churn.”

In his poem, *The Old Churn*, fancy hears the dasher sing its old-time refrain:

Bonny-clapper, dipper-dapper,
Buttermilk and cream.

When a mere lad Henry walked the entire distance between Colchester and New London, bringing a younger brother with

him; and when the little fellow was weary and footsore from contact with the rough road, Henry bore him upon his shoulders, cheerfully and bravely trudging on, so eager was he to reach our city by the sea, the Mecca of his hopes of an education.

As an early step toward the realization of these hopes he was apprenticed to the late Mr. N. D. Smith, as an organ and melodeon maker, and learned to be an expert tuner of reed instruments. He boarded in the family of Mr. Smith, and in a pleasant upper room in the factory, when his day's work was done, he studied and rested; and as he "sat musing, the fire burned"; and as he wrought his musings into rhyme, the poet was evolved.

Being both an ardent lover of rural scenes and an untiring student of literature, he found in his youth no greater pleasure than to ramble through the woods and fields with some work of a favorite author as a companion.

This communion with nature is well illustrated by the following, one of his early poems:

O nature! solace of my heart!
In thee my noblest joys I find;
For always beautiful thou art,
And unto those who love thee, kind.

Great mother, deepest truths are thine!
Thy pages make thy children wise;
When Spring re-clothes the leafless vine,
Or Summer lightning stripes the skies,

Or seas are swept by Autumn storms,
Or Winter leaves bestrew the sod;
I see in all thy varied forms,
The mystic glory of a God!

As a writer in a leading magazine of his day remarked: "He discovered beauty in the color of a flower, or the murmur of a streamlet, and often the most seemingly trivial objects, were to him the subjects of an admiring contemplation."

By systematic industry and self-denial, Henry Cornwell acquired the means for a course in the Medical School of Yale College; and graduated with distinction, being second in the large class of 1863. He afterwards practiced medicine and surgery with such success as to gain the respect of his brother practitioners, the loyal confidence of his patients, and to accumulate the modest fortune left at his death.

An interesting letter, written at the beginning of the Civil War, while the doctor was a student in Yale, is still cherished by the friend, Mrs. Harriet Chapman, to whom it was addressed.

The following extract from a personal letter reveals the sympathetic side of his nature :

"I went to see a poor patient, four miles out, to-day, a young girl, dying from the lodgment in the lung, far down, of a piece of walnut shell, swallowed while running at play. Constant cough, nocturnal perspiration, hectic, and then?—an innocent, patient thing of nine years! However, I made her smile, and hope I brought moral sunshine to that little white couch. You see we've had a revival and I am awakened."

Was not the little act of kindness to the suffering girl, the cup of cold water given in the name of Christ?—"Verily, I say unto you he shall in no wise lose his reward."

That Dr. Cornwell's medical career was very creditable is attested by the three New London physicians now living who knew him best—Drs. Nelson, Stanton, and Braman.

But on account of his love for literary pursuits he did not give himself whole-heartedly to his profession. This is shown by the fact that he voluntarily refrained from joining the State Medical Association, and by his cultivation of office in preference to outside practice, by which he gained more opportunity to keep in contact with books and writing.

Early in life Dr. Cornwell wrote *The Land of Dreams*, but deferred its publication for five years. To use his own figurative speech, as he was "occasionally struck by poetic lightning," he conducted the electricity into this poem. A manuscript copy was presented to Charles Dickens, when the great novelist passed through New London, on his tour of the United States, and was pronounced by that author to be "wonderful."

The Land of Dreams made its first appearance, revised and corrected as its author designed it to remain, in the columns of *The Landmark*, in August, 1869. From *The Landmark's* editorial department we learn that "It was printed in several of the leading journals in the United States and England, and everywhere received the high degree of praise it merited." It was afterwards translated into other languages, and has thus fulfilled the *Landmark's* prediction: "It will make his name a passport to many hearts where true genius is appreciated."

The Landmark was a weekly journal published in New York city and devoted to the interests of Freemasonry, a high order of literature, and the arts and sciences. Bayard Taylor was a frequent contributor to its columns.

One of the critics of the New York *Tribune* wrote: "The poem has haunted me. It is wonderfully ideal and imaginative, and breathes the very atmosphere of Dreamland."

Professor Martin, of Columbia College also commended *The Land of Dreams* as superior to any other poem of fancy he had noticed for a long time.

After the publication of *The Land of Dreams*, its author wrote, "Aldrich came to see me and find out who I was."

Year by year he gave the public, poems that were praised by Aldrich, Richard Henry Stoddard, Bayard Taylor, John G. Saxe and the Bohemians of the period.

In his poem *Rue*, we have a song story of his youths's romance; for in early manhood he loved a beautiful girl whose memory lives in these lines:

I muse in a chamber quaint and old,
Of a presence it never more may hold,
Of her sun-sheen hair of rippled gold,
And a carven marble so white and cold,
Out there in the rain.

* * * *

About the antique ebony bed,
The tapestries stir like the robes of the dead,
For a ghostly breeze creeps over the floor,
Like the sighs of those who have gone before.

* * * *

And thus my spirit is sad to-night.

* * * *

When I think of the dear, dead lost who sleep,
Under the green, grave-grasses deep;
And I long to add to the churchyard row,
The tablet of one who sleeps below.

He speaks in another place of an "unlanguage sorrow;" and from his letters we learn that this bereavement left him "skeptical, faithless, hopeless of self, existing in a sort of galvanic vitality, doubting even the future and the Divine."

Writing a friend he said: "The engine was whirling to its own destruction, but, fortunately, poetry furnished an escape valve."

Then, as he himself characterized his mental states, he went into "Poe spasms," and "yielding to a hasheesh dream, went up in a balloon," and referring to one of his moods of deep depression, he writes that he was "looking for sundown."

But later, in the poem, *The Fisherman's Dream*, he strikes a more hopeful chord, for in his heart he

—heard another voice
 Low-toned and full of peace, that seemed to say :
 “ Behold the creatures of the field rejoice,
 And art thou less than they ?
 Know all conditions tend to perfect ends ;
 Perform thy lot ! To heaven leave the rest.
 All things work out the good which God intends ;
 The means, He knoweth best.”

And in *Unrest*, he sings a similar strain :

I drew the casement curtain aside,
 And gazed on the midnight heaven—
 On the myriad systems sprinkled wide,
 And the sisterly Pleiades seven.
 Luminous over the beautiful sea,
 Looking like souls that were just forgiven,
 And smilingly chiding me !
 “ Ah, fool ! Ah, weak of faith ! ” I said,
 “ The angels are watching thee overhead ;
 And however men pass the day or night,
 By the Merciful One all is ordered aright.”

And in his sonnet, *Going Home*, referring to the end of life's journey, he exclaims :

—O Father, hold me not unreconciled.

One critic says : “ We recognize in the poem on Charles Dickens, the handiwork of an artist, and the best poem upon the death of the popular novelist.”

Across the sea the sudden message came,
 “ Dickens is dead ! ” and thrilled a nation's heart ;
 As all at once the splendor of his fame
 Illumed the world of art.

* * * *

But ah, not dead, though from our sight removed ;
 A household friend he lives and lingers still,
 Enshrined in every heart with names beloved,
 The children of his will.

* * * *

Nor we alone ! but on from age to age,
 Shall unborn thousands own the potent spell ;

And laugh when Pickwick comes upon the stage,
Or weep for little Nell!

* * * *

O, great magician in the world of thought;
Kind teacher, whom we shall not see again;
God grant that these, the lessons thou hast taught,
May not be all in vain!

Of *The Sunset City*, the *Landmark* says: "In presenting to our readers another gem from his intellectual casket, we have no fear that any will find the magic of his art diminished."
* * * "The imagery, poetic fervor, and tender love of nature's handiwork are visible in the form and utterances of this poem."
* * * "We hail the rising of our young American star of poesy, infinitely brighter than all the glow and grandeur of *The Sunset City*."
* * * "We regard him as unquestionably among the coming men; and in *The Haunted House*, he has given unmistakable evidence that the hand that penned *The Land of Dreams* and *The Sunset City* has not lost its occult cunning."

Here silence broods—the silence of the dead!
The lizard peeps from out the fissured walls,
As if to chide our loud intrusive tread,
That scares the bat from these deserted halls.

* * * *

The mullen lances pierce the rotten floors,
To catch the sunshine glinting through the roof;
And swinging in the solitary doors,
The hermit spider spins his filmy woof.

His pen picture of *The Old Pine* had for its original the pine tree which stood for many years on the lawn near the homes of Mr. Philip C. Dunford and the late Mr. Gilbert Bishop,

Like some tall chieftain left alone,
When all his race is dead.

Tradition says there were two tall pine trees in close proximity opposite the old mill and the picturesque glen our poet loved so well. They were named Adam and Eve, probably in honor of their great age. Eve, "touched by time," yielded to the elements; Adam lingered a few years longer, when "the hoarse tempest" laid him low.

Autumn, *The White Lady* (Snowstorm) and *The Bee* are especially full of delightful, graceful, fairy-like fancies, and abound

in those verbal felicities for which his reviewers are unanimous in praising him.

These delicate lines are from *Vigil*:

—as the lily lifts her bright,
Dew-thirsty, golden-throated vase,
I upward look to drink the grace
And tender influence of the night.

The Cricket is a touching interpretation of solitude and nature.

When sleep's soft fingers close my eyes,
And childhood's fairy pictures rise,
Thou art my sleepless sentinel,
Whose watchword tells me all is well,
Whose sudden silence warns my ear,
If aught of evil wanders near.

Thou art the hermit's closest friend;
And when my mortal day shall end,
And my cold hand at last shall tire
To light at eve the fagot fire—
Though none are left to weep for me,
Thy song my requiem shall be !

In *Autumn* we have this exquisite picture of Indian Summer :

Now comes the mellow Indian Summer time,
When wold and woodland, stretching far and fair,
In panoramic splendor lie sublime,
And waver in the illuminated air !

November seems with golden June to join,
And from the morning windows white-embossed,
The fairies of the warm west wind purloin
The silver pictures of the artist, Frost !

As some sad lover, touched with soft regret,
Pauses, remembering all his lady's charms,
Then chides the weakness that cannot forget,
Then turns again to seek her happy arms ;

So the weak year, too foolish and too fond,
Reverses his slow steps and backward goes,
Irresolute to break so sweet a bond,
And leave unkist the Summer's latest rose.

Of all Dr. Cornwell's poems *The Bee* is perhaps the one which would please the widest circle of readers.

For he is a royal bandit bold,
And wears a double belt of gold ,

And hidden underneath
A rapier in its sheath.

* * * *

Grander music some may have,
None is half so quaint as thine;
Like the drowsy monotone,
Of a tiny bagpipe's drone.

* * * *

Ah, would I too, might roam and be
Thy Summer comrade, fancy free!
And leave, for aye, the cares and strife
That vex with trouble, mortal life,
And follow the Spring,
And sail and sing,
Gipsy of the air! with thee,
Busy, buzzy, wee, brown bee.

A criticism in *The Waverley Magazine* in 1849 is responsible for the statement that "although Dr. Cornwell's pen productions were chiefly lyrical, he wrote several prose sketches and stories which prove his intellect to have been of no ordinary character."

Many of his poems were published in *The Home Journal*, when under the editorship of N. P. Willis, it was the *belles lettres* organ of this country. Francis Gerry Fairfield, who was sub-editor under Willis, wrote: "Though Dr. Cornwell's temperament was mainly lyrical, he added to literature, specimens of blank verse which indicate a mind often in harmony with that of Hood." Dr. Cornwell has also been compared to Coleridge, "whose best characteristics he possessed, together with all the dreamy loveliness of metaphor disclosed in every turn and winding of his verse."

In the introduction to an early edition of Dr. Cornwell's verse, Fairfield wrote: "Many of his poems will live in future anthologies." Apropos of this prediction it may be said that six Cornwell selections are included in Walter Learned's *Treasury of American Verse*, while Bryant's *Library of Poetry and Song* contains *The Sunset City*, and Edith Granger's *Index to Poetry and Recitation* includes several of the sonnets to the months together with *My Owl*, *Unrest*, *The Angel Ferry* and *The Sunset City*.

Francis Gerry Fairfield was a native of Stafford, Conn. He studied theology at a Lutheran seminary in Pennsylvania and was for a time pastor of a church in Waterloo, N. Y., but later entered journalism in New York City, and made a name for

himself among the poets. Writing further in the introduction just referred to, he says: "On my way to New York, I called on the poet with a curiosity to see this dreamer of New London, and receive some impression of the man whose poems were magnetism set to music. I found him sick, saddened, and full of strange spiritual fancies, to which all persons of poetic temper are more or less prone."

Fairfield, in his letters, refers to his wife as a very gifted woman, having a finely cultivated voice, and urges our poet to visit them; and "have the blue devils put to flight by her charming and remarkable singing." He also speaks of her enthusiasm for the genius of Cornwell, saying, "from her he had nothing to fear."

Aldrich pays tribute in these words: "If your volume should contain many poems like *The Land of Dreams* and *The Song of the Syrens*, it will make you famous—famous at least among those who study poetry."

In 1857 Bayard Taylor wrote: "I recollect the poems very distinctly. They contain a great deal of promise. They show true poetic feeling and a fine sense of the melody of verse. I looked them over with Stoddard and we both thought they possessed true poetic feeling."

Francis Manwaring Caulkins, New London's gifted poet and historian wrote in 1857: "Your pleasing poem, *The Land of Dreams*, furnishes evidence of taste and skill in poetic composition, and makes it imperative upon you to cultivate this path of literature. Application is the handmaid of genius. Persevere and you cannot fail of winning garlands."

These are brief tributes to Dr. Cornwell from the literary lights of his own generation; longer and equally commendatory ones remain unquoted.

That our poet was a kindly and just critic of other poets is recalled by Mrs. Mary L. Bolles Branch, one of New London's present day group of writers.

Mrs. Marion H. Stayner Lillie writes: "Once in talking with Dr. Cornwell of a poem which he had just written, I spoke of what seemed to me an excessive use of alliteration; his justification of this showed me how careful he was in his choice and shading of words—how deftly he fitted the jewelled bits into the mosaic of his fancy. What an artist he was in this."

In his early days Dr. Cornwell wrote: "I do not care to sell for money these children of my fancy; at the same time 'I am Skimpole.'" And again in 1874: "Their composition

has been a labor of love to me, and has engaged some of the best hours of my life."

Dr. Cornwell revised conscientiously, and as a rule carried his poems a year before he permitted them to appear in print, that every production might be polished like a gem.

Many of them found ready entrance to the columns of *Scribner's*, *Atlantic Monthly*, and other periodicals of like literary standing.

As examples of his verbal felicities, these lines from his sonnets on the months are very striking:

Down ring the daggered icicles like steel.

* * * *

The landscape glints with ice
Where woodland streams from the hoar precipice
Leap and congeal; or where, a silver thread,
The joyless brook pines in its frozen bed;
Or where by drifted roads the sign-board stands,
And stretches toward the sun its ice-mailed hands.

So, fierce and blustering tyrant, vanisheth
Thy kingdom like a dream! No requiem
Breeze-borne for thee, laments along the land,
For lo, behind thee, one, whose gentler breath
Fast thaws thy diamond-frosted diadem,
Trips radiant with a crocus in her hand!

Early an admirer of Tennyson, Dr. Cornwell once wrote the laureate, expressing his sense of the obligation of American poets to the English master; and received an autograph letter of thanks, bearing date of June 11th, 1855.

The doctor must have been something of a linguist, for there is in his later published volume a little poem translated from the French; and another in manuscript, *Highland Johnny*, is written in the Scotch dialect.

His poem on *The Violin* was composed after hearing Eduard Remenyi, the Hungarian violin virtuoso, who visited the United States for the first time in 1849, and was later appointed solo violinist to Queen Victoria.

Eulalie was set to music by Stephen Foster, composer of *Old Folks at Home*, *Massa's in the Cold*, *Cold Ground*, and other popular songs. The musical critic of *The Springfield Republican* wrote of *Eulalie*: "The music is well adapted to the sweetness and pathos of the words and is probably the most correct and refined melody Mr. Foster has ever written."

In politics, Dr. Cornwell was an enthusiastic Republican. Ardently loyal during the Civil War, numerous poems were inspired by his fervor of patriotic feeling.

In *Jefferson D.*, printed in *The New York Tribune*, the doctor gives the gentleman addressed a piece of his mind in forceful English. *Lex Virginiana* is a caustic satire on the John Brown episode, and appeared in the *New London Chronicle*. The *New Haven Palladium* published his stirring piece entitled *Conquer or Die*, which contains this prophetic stanza :

Still Queen of the world shall America be,
The hope of the exile, the pride of the free ;
Her watchword is " Onward ; " her mission divine ;
And the star of her glory shall never decline !
Then fling out the flag to the breezes on high,
Wherever it leads us we conquer or die !

From his poem on *Lincoln* these few lines are quoted :

O, Great Backwoodsman, Statesman, President !
If this one loud lament
Can reach the glorious station where thou art—
Take to thy own great heart
 The homage and the gratitude we owe !
 We never knew we loved thee so,
Till thou didst vanish at the Shining Gate,
Leaving us desolate !
Ah me, the slow revolving years
Shall come again, and go,
And stars and seasons circle in their spheres,
 Perennial as our woe !

Dr. Cornwell was a Freemason, and to Union Lodge of New London belongs the distinction of having enrolled him as a member in October, 1866.

There is now in the possession of Mr. John C. Turner a charm which Dr. Cornwell used to wear upon his watch guard. It is a little gold emblem of the crescent and the star, bearing the initials K. K. O. If any one can interpret the inscription, the writer would gladly be enlightened.

Some of Dr. Cornwell's poems of the early sixties were suggested by scenes and incidents at the home of the late Mr. Gilbert Bishop, where a little coterie of choice friends frequently met. Mr. George C. Waldo and Miss Evelyn Forsyth (Mrs. Yarndley, a pleasing writer of verse, now resident in Chicago) were among the number. For the delectation of these friends, Mr. Waldo contributed a little pen and ink production, entitled

The Semi-Occasional Latitudinarian. Its contents were mostly nonsense in prose and verse, written as the spirit moved—to use Mr. Waldo's phrase—and they were illustrated by his pen.

A pleasing sequence of the reading of this memoir in manuscript before the Lucretia Shaw Chapter, D. A. R., was the discovery that the Latitudinarian papers—supposed by their author to have met oblivion—had been, at an early date, collected and bound and were still preserved among the treasures of the Bishop home.

From 1873 to 1880, *The New London Telegram* enjoyed a reputation for printing very good poetry. The Poet's Corner was under the supervision of Mr. John C. Turner, and was frequently graced by Dr. Cornwell's compositions.

One of the doctor's most cherished possessions was an old daguerreotype of Edgar Allan Poe, whom he so much admired. It is now the property of Mr. Turner, to whom it was presented by the poet some little time previous to his death.

Our poet numbered among his friends Sarah Helen Whitman, the brilliant woman who was at one time the fiancé of Poe, and they frequently exchanged poems in the course of their correspondence. In a paper called *The Star Spangled Banner*, was printed a poem, presumably hers, though not signed with full name, addressed to H. S. Cornwell, in which she thus predicts recognition of his songs :

Sing on, rare minstrel ! Future days,
Shall bring to thee a worthy name
That shall not be forgotten. Fame
Shall crown thy brows with greenest bays.

It would be a fine instance of "poetic justice," if those lines might prove the answer to the questions the poet asks of Fate, when composing, *In the Library*.

A spell is on my fancy cast
By wits and poets of the past ;

* * * *

I revel in the fancies fine
Of all the long illustrious line ;

* * * *

So musing on their deathless fame,
I think, shall I, too, leave a name ?
Shall my poor songs, when I am dumb,
Delight some heart in years to come ?

The singer walked our winding shady streets almost unrecognized. It was permitted us to "touch him in the throng and press" of busy life, yet we knew him not for the manner of poet that he was.

As the writer recalls him, Dr. Cornwell was of medium height, with the slightly stooping shoulders of the student. His exceptionally large amber-grey eyes glowed from behind the gold-rimmed glasses clearly, but most often with a far-away unseeing gaze. His fine, broad forehead was framed with abundant waving hair, originally jet black, and scarcely touched with grey at the time of his death.

Morbidly sensitive in temperament, modest to a fault when gauging his own literary merit, he yet loved praise when he could believe it was sincere and merited.

His penmanship was delicate and refined, not unlike specimens of the feminine hand of half a century ago.

Through the kindness of a mutual friend, the writer has enjoyed the privilege of reading his letters and poems in manuscripts that are models of neatness.

As known by his poetic fruits, Dr. Cornwell would seem to have been well endowed with imagination, wit and humor, yet some supposed authority is reported to have said that "his phrenological developments indicated a mind more inclined to deep thought than playful fancy, to reasoning rather than to mirthfulness." In this connection might be mentioned a bright little thing printed among his early poems.

A Redbreast sat on an orchard's edge ;
Singing, " Heigh-ho, I'm Robin !"—
When he spied an urchin under the hedge,
To the farmer's apples laying siege—
And he knew it was wrong,
But continued his song,
Singing, " Heigh-ho, he's robbin' !"

His *Advent of the Mosquito* has been much quoted.

His sucker, like a burglar's drill,
Would pierce an iron door ;
He loves as Alexander did,
To wade in human gore,
And like the Hoosac Tunnel, he's
An everlasting bore.

Quite delightful is the rollicking rhythm of *Health to Connecticut*, a poem of five stanzas, from which these three are taken :

Now in a pint of "native grape"
 (My blessing on the sender)
 Whose blush is not the kind that owns
 The fixing of the vender—
 To hardy old Connecticut
 A hearty health I render—
 May despots ever fear her name,
 And patriots defend her !

* * * *

Shall pumpkin pies be e'er forgot,
 Or those Thanksgiving dinners—
 Where marshalling a household host,
 Of hungry saints and sinners,
 Attacking Turkey long and strong,
 At last we ended winners ;
 Or only beat retreat to make
 More room for new beginners ?

* * * *

Then here's to old Connecticut—
 God's benizon upon her !
 Who shows so fair a register,
 However we may con her ?
 Long may she live, and long enjoy
 The fame her worth has won her—
 Long live to rear her gallant sons
 To posts of trust and honor !

Two very pretty examples of the doctor's light verse are *Mignonette* and *Sub-Rosa*, copies of which are kindly furnished for this memoir by the friend to whom they were inscribed :

MIGNONETTE.

"Now tell me true," the maiden said,
 "Which of these flowers you love the best ;
 Pied pinks, or roses white and red,
 Sweet mignonette and all the rest."

And I replied, "To choose were hard
 Where fancy upon each is set ;
 But still my tenderer regard
 I yield to modest mignonette."

She only smiled a thoughtful smile,
The triumph of her secret power ;
Ah me ! how could I tell the while,
Her friends had named her for the flower.

SUB-ROSA.

Last night when eve's one star was set
Pale in the western sky,
I sat and watched with Mignonette
The amber twilight die.

Our words were sad, some elfin fell
So envied joy's repose ;
But what we said I cannot tell,
It was beneath the rose.

For cares will come, though mortals pray
For pleasures overplus ;
We only clasp our hands and say ;
" Dear Rose, be true to us ! "

Our poet loved old ocean,

The lonely sea-gull knows my form
As I walk by the rolling wave,
And his jubilant scream from the flying storm
Is the voice of a comrade brave.

And on the shore he heard

The solemn wind a-talking
And the answer of the sea.

By the amber light
Of the magic moon,
I sat by the summer sea ;
And listened long with a strange delight,
At night, in the leafy month of June,
To the mystic rune of its ceaseless tune,
And its marvelous melody.

And in the refrain he seemed to hear

For what are the kings of the earth to me ?
I am the Spirit of the Sea !

The first collection of Dr. Cornwell's poems known to the writer is the edition published by Riggs & Co., of Middletown. A later edition was published by Charles Allyn, of New London, and contained only a few of what the poet esteemed to be his choicest pen productions.

A copy presented to Mr. and Mrs. James H. Hill contains this gracefully modest inscription :

If, in your intervals of ease,
These songs of mine have power to please;
Not farther need my hope aspire,
I have accomplished my desire.

Dr. Cornwell was very fond of New London, the home of his adoption, and his residences elsewhere were brief. After learning his trade and before going to Yale College, he worked for a time in Westfield, Conn., and after receiving his diploma, he was located for a short period in Middletown.

When, in later life he found it advisable to try the bracing air of the West for incipient pulmonary troubles, he spent one winter in Kansas, and two in Minnesota. That he longed for the old home is apparent from these lines in *Winter Midnight*, written in Minnesota, in 1873 :

But in vain for me the red North shakes
His battle-banners on high;
Or like golden bridges, o'er streams and lakes,
The shafts of the moonlight lie;

There is beauty below, there is splendor above,
But ah, they are nothing to me!
For my heart is afar with the friends I love,
By the shore of the Eastern sea.

One of Dr. Cornwell's latest and most plaintive poems is *Together*, the last stanza of which is given here.

We want each other so—to comprehend
The dream, the hope, things planned, or seen, or wrought.
Companion, comforter, and guide, and friend!
As much as love asks love, does thought need thought.
Life is so short, so fast the lone hours fly—
We ought to be together, you and I!

A friend who essays poetry observed to the writer, "I am struck with the wisdom of Mr. Aldrich's commendation." Dr. Cornwell's greatest claim is certainly on those who study poetry. "His special genius," continues this modern critic, "was for language. He was first and always a musician. He played with words as though they were the keys of an instrument. His technique is a fascinating study to anyone who attempts poetic composition. For whatever he desires to express he has vivid and musical forms for its embodiment. If he occupies a lower

niche of fame than other American poets, it is due to no lack of natural faculty for expression, but to difference in ideals. Language is after all but the medium for the poet's message. Poetry with Dr. Cornwell was largely the diversion of a mind of recluse habit. It served the need of his own life and gives pleasure of its special kind to those who read.

"Even the defects of his poems are in themselves of psychological interest to students of poetry. The melancholy of the man is seen to reappear in his work as lack of faith in the highest realities of life. His sentiment cannot be depended on to be always wholesome. He does not find the ultimate word to say on his themes, because he is not inspired to look for it.

"The master poet is known by his 'compelling note,' the secret of which is faith, and he is immortal through the moral uplift which he imparts to men, a saving grace to which they cling as to life itself.

"Other poets have had greater opportunities as thinkers and make a more universal appeal to the hearts and minds of their fellowmen, but Dr. Cornwell's fame is secure within its own limits. He had a rare particular quality of expression, from a union of eye and ear faculty, which is perhaps best described in Fairfield's words; 'His ear for music is so subtle that he seems to see with it; and with the Arab's ear he is a little Saracenic in the type of his imaginings.'"

Living almost the life of a recluse our poet formed few friendships, but these were lasting; for those who knew him best appreciated him most. Thomas S. Collier, of the U. S. Navy, author of *Song Spray*, John R. Bolles, our lawyer poet, the talented Major John A. Tibbitts, the brilliant Oscar F. Hewitt, the publicly-devoted George Colfax—all these of Dr. Cornwell's former associates, have found with him the land which to us is still "The Undiscovered Country."

Between Dr. Cornwell and George C. Waldo, editor of The Bridgeport *Standard*, John C. Turner, another journalist, and Walter Learned, New London's banker poet, there existed a warm friendship, notwithstanding the disparity of years.

Also among the doctor's intimates were the popular and versatile Dr. Edward Prentis, to whom our city is indebted for the valuable work, *Ye Antient Buriall Place*; and Mr. Horace H. Daboll, of the firm of Nichols & Harris, whose pharmacy was one of Dr. Cornwell's favorite haunts. Mr. Daboll still devotedly cherishes a number of choice books, the gift of his friend; and in his well known genial way, delights to recount incidents of his association with their donor.

Some one has said, "Quantity as well as quality, when the quality is always high, goes to prove genius."

The extent and variety of Dr. Cornwell's literary achievements is surprising, when it is remembered that his career was threefold. Writing was with him but an avocation followed side by side with his successive bread-winning vocations. Moreover he had to contend with the slow encroachments of the disease which was to bring him the death summons while he yet lacked fifteen years of the allotted span of human life. Not devoting himself exclusively to literature, he lacked the self-confidence bred by the "give and take" of contact with fellow workers which would have led him farther into the field of publication.

When "the clock of the year was striking the hour of June," on the sixth day—1886—after many and varied sufferings, Dr. Cornwell gained his final rest.

His last illness occurred at the residence of the late Mr. Joseph Scroggie, where for a number of years he had made his home. His brother physicians were most devoted, one or another being constantly in attendance at his bedside.

He was borne to a quiet country burial ground in Westfield, a few miles from Meriden, and laid near the grave of the girl he had loved in his youth; and as befits one who had ever held nature dear, he reposes in a beautiful, peaceful spot, where the wild birds sing sweetly in the summer time, and the wild flowers grow and blossom in the grass.

When you and I are asleep, my love,
Under the carven stone;
Who will there be left to weep, my love,
Of all that we have known?
But the lark will sing as clear and free,
As she springs from her nest in the alder-tree.
And the robin carol his heart's desire,
Above us in the red-rose brier.

* * * *

But it's, Oh, for the long and lasting sleep,
Where the wild-wood honeysuckles creep!
Under the violets to lie,
And let the weary world go by.

Although Dr. Cornwell was never a member of any church, that he was far from indifferent to the power of religion is evidenced by such poems as *The Angel Ferry* and *Going Home*.

The shadows deepen, one by one,
The sun is set, the day is done,
And like a star on my growing sight,

I can see at last the signal light.
High over the rocking wave it rides,
And swiftly toward the margin glides,
I can hear the rush of that spirit barque,
And mellow splendors pierce the dark !
Adieu, dim world ! ere I'm wafted o'er
To the friends who wait on the farther shore.

GOING HOME.

When the end comes, and like a tired child,
I fall beside the long highway of Time,
Nor strive the last, rough, upward range to climb—
O Father, hold me not unrecognized !
Let me not then remember all the wild
And thorny ways through which my wounded feet
So long have toiled ; but rather what beguiled
My way of pain, and made it oft times sweet
With laughter of glad streams, and pastures green,
And fragrant forest pathways opening wide
On dewy meadows sparkling in the sun,
Like gleams of Paradise in dreams foreseen !
So shall my slumber be unterrified,
And my awakening find the journey done.

This was the poet Cornwell.

“ Say not the poet dies ;
His soul the air enshrines and leaves but dust below.”

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